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International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination

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COMMITTEE ON THE ELIMINATION
OF RACIAL DISCRIMINATION
Fiftieth session

CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS SUBMITTED BY STATES
PARTIES UNDER ARTICLE 9 OF THE CONVENTION

Concluding observations of the Committee on the
Elimination of Racial Discrimination

Iceland

1. The Committee considered the fourteenth periodic report of Iceland (CERD/C/299/Add.4), at its 1202nd meeting (CERD/C/SR.1202), on 13 March 1997. At its 1212th meeting, held on 20 March 1997, it adopted the following concluding observations.

A. Introduction

2. The Committee commends the State party on the quality of its report, submitted in due time and drawn up in accordance with the Committee's guidelines. The Committee is satisfied with the frank and constructive approach taken by the representatives of the reporting State in their dialogue with the Committee and for the additional information they provided with regard to recent developments relating to the implementation of the Convention in Iceland.

B. Factors and difficulties impeding the implementation of the Convention

3. The Committee notes that whereas Iceland has incorporated the European Convention on Human Rights into Icelandic law, by Act No. 62/1994, it has not done so with regard to the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. Conferring constitutional status on the Convention would enhance its effectiveness by providing for direct domestic application.

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C. Positive factors

4. The Committee expresses satisfaction that in February 1995 the Althing, Iceland's legislature, amended its Constitution to reflect provisions of human rights treaties to which Iceland is a party. The amendment provides for extensive changes and additions to human rights provisions previously in effect. Whereas the principle of equality had been unwritten law and practice in Iceland, the new constitutional provisions now render it written law. Of particular relevance to the Committee is section 65, subsection 1, which stipulates equality without regard to national origin, race or colour. The Committee also welcomes the 1996 amendment to the Personal Names Act, abolishing the requirement that a naturalized foreigner assume an Icelandic-sounding family name. Henceforth, both the naturalized person and his children can retain their family names.

5. The Committee welcomes the fact that the Althing adopted changes to the Penal Code in December 1996 making racial discrimination punishable by law. This goes beyond the previously existing penal provisions of section 233 (a) of the Penal Code concerning public attacks on a group of persons on the grounds of their nationality, colour, race or religion, and of section 125 concerning ridicule of the religion or worship of a lawful religious community in Iceland.

6. Iceland's information on the implementation of article 7 of the Convention is appreciated. In particular, the Committee is pleased that Iceland has issued and widely distributed a brochure containing the Convention, and that Iceland's Human Rights Office undertakes special lectures on human rights and tolerance for persons working with and teaching immigrants. Human rights education is provided both in the schools and for the adult population. In the Icelandic School for Policemen a general course on human rights is compulsory, and all major international conventions on human rights are introduced to the students.

7. The Committee commends the State party for having distributed the Committee's concluding observations concerning Iceland's previous reports to the public media, most of which commented on them, thereby providing an occasion for public debate in Iceland.

8. The Committee welcomes the establishment of a special Information and Cultural Centre for Foreigners in Reykjavik in 1994, which, inter alia, provides practical information concerning residents' permits, health care, social services, insurance and the school system.

9. The Committee notes with satisfaction that Iceland has made the declaration under article 14 of the Convention, thus enabling its residents to avail themselves of the individual communications procedure.

D. Principal subjects of concern

10. The Committee notes that its previous concluding observations, dated 17 August 1994, contained four recommendations concerning the Convention's status in the domestic legal order of Iceland, measures to implement fully the provisions of article 4 of the Convention, measures to

combat racial discrimination in the fields of teaching, education, culture or information, and acceptance of the amendment to article 8, paragraph 6, of the Convention. Iceland has partially implemented only one of those recommendations, concerning article 4 of the Convention, and has not provided the Committee with any explanation of why it has not been able to implement the other three.

E. Suggestions and recommendations

11. The Committee suggests that further publicity be given to the State party's declaration under article 14, so as to make this recourse more widely available to the residents of Iceland.

12. The Committee reiterates its previous recommendations to fully implement article 4 of the Convention and to adopt measures according to article 7 in the field of teaching, education, culture and information.

13. In its forthcoming report, the Committee would welcome further information on the naturalization law and its mechanisms.

14. The Committee invites the State party to make its report and the Committee's concluding observations widely available in Iceland with a view to enhancing public awareness of the problems and dangers of racial discrimination. The Committee would welcome information on relevant public debate in the forthcoming report.

15. The Committee recommends that the State party ratify the amendments to article 8, paragraph 6, of the Convention adopted at the 14th meeting of States parties.

16. The Committee recommends that the State party's next periodic report be an updating report and that it address all the points raised during the consideration of the report.